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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995

Procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its report on the work of its thirty-first session, 1/ the Committee for Programme and Coordination noted that the procedures and norms currently used to evaluate the workload and other needs of the various units in the Secretariat, to justify the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts, should be further refined.

2. In section II of its resolution 46/185 B of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review and develop procedures and norms to justify the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts, and to submit a report with proposals through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session. Accordingly, the Secretary-General submitted a note 2/ to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session which summarized the current procedures for changes in the staffing table of the Organization and suggested possible directions for improvement.

3. In section III of its resolution 47/212 of 23 December 1992, the General Assembly expressed regret that the note by the Secretary-General did not contain proposals for improving the current methods and processes and also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session on all issues related to the creation, suppression, reclassification and redeployment of posts.

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4. In section I.E of its resolution 48/218 of 23 December 1993, the General Assembly took note of the note by the Secretary-General, 3/ and requested that a report on procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts be submitted through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session. The Assembly reiterated this request in section I, paragraph 14, of its resolution 48/228 of 23 December 1993.

5. In its report 4/ concerning the Secretary-General's report on the proposed reclassification of posts in the programme budget for 1994-1995, 5/ the Advisory Committee recommended that in his report to be submitted to the General Assembly on procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts, the Secretary-General should include his views on how current procedures could be changed in order to achieve the following objectives: (a) granting to the Secretary-General the authority to reclassify posts up to the P-5 level, while ensuring that the relationship between the overall numbers for each grade level was maintained; (b) ensuring that the existing appropriations were not exceeded; and (c) ensuring that adequate control by the Secretariat and monitoring by the Assembly were in place, including procedures for providing information to the Advisory Committee and the Assembly on action taken by the Secretary-General under his authority. In its resolution 48/228 C of 29 July 1994, the Assembly endorsed the recommendation and requested the Secretary-General to include in the report his views on how the current procedures could be changed to achieve the objectives outlined in the report of the Advisory Committee.

6. The present report is submitted in response to the requests outlined above.

II. PROCEDURES FOR REVIEWING AND MODIFYING THE APPROVED STAFFING OF THE ORGANIZATION

7. The procedures for reviewing and modifying the approved staffing of the Organization differs significantly between the major funding sources for United Nations posts. The staffing requirements of peace-keeping operations, for example, tend to be inherently unpredictable over the course of a biennium and are subject to different budgetary procedures. The staffing of other extrabudgetary activities over the course of a biennium varies with such factors as the availability of voluntary contributions and, for example, the number and severity of humanitarian emergencies and the scope of activities in various sectors. The nature and extent of the review process for such posts also varies with the purpose of and the source and nature of funding for each activity. The present report, however, will focus on the question of procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of regular budget posts.

8. Changes to the staffing table of the Organization are considered regularly in the context of the preparation and review of the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget. At the Secretariat level, changes proposed by departments and offices are first reviewed by the Programme Planning and Budget Division of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and then by the Advisory Panel

on Management and Finance. 6/ In so far as the changes proposed involve classification of new posts or reclassification of existing posts, the Compensation and Classification Service of the Office of Human Resources Management is also involved. The proposals are finally approved by the Secretary-General for review by the General Assembly. Changes to the staffing table may also be proposed through revised estimates and through statements of programme budget implications of draft resolutions considered by the General Assembly.

9. The distribution of posts in the programme budget reflects their programmatic relationship with the work of the Organization. Changes in the distribution of posts are considered in the light of changes in the programme of work of each department/office in terms of the level and scope of their activities, whether expanded or reduced. If changes in post requirements cannot be met through redeployment, the Secretary-General proposes the establishment of new posts. The post requirements are also reviewed in terms of the temporary or permanent nature of the activities involved in order to determine whether posts should be temporary, permanent or involve only funds for general temporary assistance during a short-term period.

A. Creation, suppression and redeployment of posts

10. The procedures and norms currently used for the creation, suppression and redeployment of posts are applied at the time of the proposed programme budget as well as its revisions. Proposals for new posts and reclassification of existing posts are subject to job classification (see paras. 16-31). The creation, suppression and redeployment of posts follow the steps referred to in paragraph 8 above. A weakness in the current procedures is the absence of a systematic review, particularly in terms of possible reorientation of work programmes and setting priorities, by programme managers prior to requesting additional post requirements.

11. The following criteria should be systematically applied when additional posts are deemed necessary:

(a) The level and scope of new or expanded activities, verified by workload indicators developed by the organizational unit;

(b) The functional relationship of proposed post to the programme of work of the organizational unit;

(c) The possibility of redeployment from other areas within the same budget section;

(d) The possibility of redeployment from other budget sections (this would also entail consideration of programmatic implications for the work of the "donor" section);

(e) The feasibility of funding the posts within the framework of budgetary policies;

(f) The determination of the level of the post after the criteria in subparagraphs (a)-(e) are met.

12. In areas where activities have been discontinued, diminished in volume or reoriented, consideration is given to the suppression of related posts. If there are, however, programmes requiring additional posts, the possibility of redeployment instead of suppression of posts to those programmes is considered.

13. For determining post requirements, workload standards should be applied to substantiate the case for proposed increases in staffing. Difficulties have been encountered in developing standards for the many different activities undertaken by the Organization; the only major area in which workload standards have been established is language services, but even those require further modification and refinement. It would not, of course, be appropriate to apply universal workload standards to the large variety of activities carried out by the Organization; workload indicators need to be developed by programme managers according to the specific nature of the work involved. It is the intention of the Secretary-General to use those indicators in the context of the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997.

14. Another difficulty in the application of all of the above procedures is the time factor, particularly in the case of statements of programme budget implications when only 48 hours is available for the preparation of proposals.

15. The emphasis in recent budgetary periods on cost containment and the need to maintain or reduce the number of posts financed under the regular budget has focused attention on the scope for meeting new and increasing needs in some areas by redeployment of resources, including posts, from areas that are either of lower priority or where restructuring has led to reduced staff resources. The recent restructuring of the Secretariat has resulted in significant shifts in post requirements between the major parts of the budget, as indicated in table 1 below. While the Secretary-General remains committed to exploring with equal energy possibilities for redeployments when new or expanded activities are requested by Member States there are limits to how many additional tasks the Organization can assume without incurring additional costs, including additional requirements for administrative and support units whose effective functioning is a prerequisite for the implementation of substantive activities.

Table 1. Established and temporary posts approved under the initial appropriations for 1990-1991, 1992-1993 and 1994-1995

(Percentage)

	Posts at the Professional level and above				Other categories			
	1990-1991	1992-1993	1994-1995	Change	1990-1991	1992-1993	1994-1995	Change
Overall policy-making, direction and coordination	3.3	1.2	1.2	(2.1)	2.4	1.1	1.2	(1.2)
Political affairs	7.5	5.7	5.8	(1.7)	9.7	9.6	8.7	(1.0)
International justice and law	2.0	2.7	2.8	0.8	1.3	1.8	1.9	0.6
International cooperation for development	19.0	19.9	19.1	0.1	10.4	11.1	11.0	0.6
Regional cooperation for development	20.5	20.6	20.7	0.2	21.7	21.6	21.9	0.2
Human rights and humanitarian affairs	4.0	6.4	7.7	3.7	3.2	3.5	4.1	0.9
Public information a/	6.0	6.0	7.9	1.9	7.1	7.2	8.7	1.6
Common support services b/	36.9	36.7	33.0	(3.9)	43.6	43.5	41.5	(2.1)
Special expenses	0.8	0.8	0.8	-	0.6	0.6	0.6	-
Inspections and investigations c/	-	-	1.0	1.0	-	-	0.4	0.4
Number of posts approved	3 828	3 865	3 858	+0.8%	6 065	6 089	6 107	+0.7%

a/ Figures for 1994-1995 include 70 Professional and above and 90 other categories of post transferred from the Office of Conference and Support Services for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and certain publishing functions.

b/ The figures for 1994-1995 reflect, inter alia, transfers of 110 Professional and 113 other posts to the Department of Public Information and the Office for Inspections and Investigations with their functions.

c/ The figures for 1994-1995 reflect transfers from the Department of Administration and Management of posts with their related functions.

B. Classification of posts

16. Job classification is a management tool for determining the relative value of jobs within an organization. The primary objective of job classification is to ensure that jobs of equivalent value are graded at the same level and their remuneration is competitive with that offered for comparable jobs in the outside market. In the United Nations Secretariat, all posts are classified on the basis of classification standards that have been promulgated by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). For posts in the Professional and higher categories, the Master Standard for the classification of Professional posts, promulgated with effect from 1 January 1981, is used; for posts in the General Service and related categories, ICSC promulgated separate classification standards for use by organizations of the United Nations common system in New York, Geneva, Vienna and in non-headquarters duty stations.

17. The process of job classification consists of two parts: (a) job analysis, which is the identification of the job's content through the examination of job descriptions, organizational charts, information obtained from programme mandates and through job audits; and (b) job evaluation, which is the measurement of a post's position within the grade hierarchy, through the application of classification standards. Once proper classification grading of the job is determined, it may be formalized through processing a classification decision on the level of the post following procedures established for this purpose in the Organization.

18. The initial classification level of a new post is normally determined in the context of budget preparation when establishment of the post is proposed for performance of specific functions in a specified organizational unit. The job description for the proposed post is transmitted to the Office of Human Resources Management for grading and the conclusions of the classification review are taken into account in finalizing the proposed programme budget. The same procedure is followed when a change in the level of an established post is proposed in the context of preparing the proposed programme budget.

19. The initial classification reviews of posts are also undertaken in the framework of implementation of classification standards with respect to established posts that were not previously classified; this is normally done following promulgation of a new classification standard. Such initial classification exercises are also closely linked with the programme budget process since, in order to implement the results of the classification review, relevant changes in the staffing table first have to be approved by the General Assembly.

20. In addition, according to existing procedures, a new classification review of posts in the United Nations Secretariat is conducted whenever the job description is updated in connection with the post becoming vacant or where the duties and responsibilities of a post have changed substantially as a result of changes in the mandated programme of work of the office, or as a result of reorganization within the office. When such a classification review of a post is initiated, a job description is prepared by the programme manager and is transmitted to the Office of Human Resources Management for classification grading. Duties and responsibilities of posts submitted for the ongoing

classification review might have changed significantly compared with the functions for which the post was initially established by the General Assembly. Even if the internal classification review concludes that new duties would warrant classification grading at the level higher than the one approved for the post in the programme budget, the Office of Human Resources Management is precluded from taking action to upgrade the level of the post so as to ensure that the staffing table approved by the General Assembly is not changed.

21. Another instance outside the context of the normal budgetary review process where the classification level of a specific post might change is related to appeals of classification decisions. Under existing procedures, once a classification decision is taken on a post, the incumbent of the post or the head of the office in which the post is located may appeal the classification decision. The appeals are reviewed by a classification appeals body.

22. The experience of the last 13 years of implementing and administering the job classification system in the United Nations Secretariat reveals a number of shortcomings in the way it is applied. The process has largely been a reactive one, which has not been adequately incorporated in the overall management of the Organization. For example, the classification programme has not been formally involved in the identification of posts which should, owing to redundant supervisory levels or overlapping functions, be suppressed or made available for redeployment to other areas of the Secretariat. Ideally, classification personnel should be actively involved in the provision of advice to managers on the structuring of assignments and implications of restructuring proposals on the levels and relationships of posts. By providing advice on the consequences of different job designs, a number of organizational problems can be identified and corrected early on. At present, these and other problems are normally only identified after decisions have already been taken, thereby limiting the classification programme's contribution to management.

23. If used appropriately, job classification can be a very useful management tool. Job classification provides the framework for the identification of the types, levels and numbers of jobs within an organization. Information obtained from job classification can facilitate balanced allocation of human resources, the efficient structuring of organizational units, and the identification of areas where existing functions overlap, do not relate properly or are inconsistent internally. These aspects of job classification could be of particular value in the process of preparing the proposed programme budget. In order to achieve this potential, however, it will be necessary to ensure a closer integration or coordination of the function with those of staffing table control.

24. As indicated in table 2 below, application of the current system of classification and approval of grade levels for the regular budget staffing of the Organization has resulted in a rather stable grade distribution over the last decade. This is despite significant changes in the work programme and structure of the Organization over that period and a reduction in overall staffing financed by the regular budget. This suggests that maintaining a stable relationship between overall numbers at each grade level and respecting existing appropriations for staff should be quite feasible.

Table 2. Grade distribution of established and temporary Professional and higher-level posts approved in the context of initial appropriations under the regular budget of the United Nations

(Percentages)

	1984-1985	1986-1987	1988-1989	1990-1991	1992-1993	1994-1995	Change 1984-1985 to 1994-1995
USG	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5	(0.2)
ASG	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.4	(0.2)
D-2	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.1	(0.2)
D-1	7.0	7.2	7.1	6.9	7.1	7.1	0.1
P-5	17.9	17.8	17.8	17.2	17.6	17.7	(0.2)
P-4	29.9	29.5	29.3	29.7	29.7	29.9	-
P-3	28.0	28.4	28.2	28.1	28.2	28.4	0.4
P-2/1	13.6	13.4	13.8	14.6	14.0	13.9	0.3
Total number of Professional and higher-level posts	4 553	4 253	4 275	3 828	3 865	3 858	-15.3%
Total number of other categories posts	7 418	6 962	6 951	6 065	6 089	6 107	-17.7%

25. With regard to the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to grant the Secretary-General the authority to classify posts up to the P-5 level, one way to implement this would be through budgeting posts in the Professional category at a single level, i.e., in the same manner as is currently done for General Service (other level) posts. Alternatively, the staffing table could continue to be established in the current manner but the Secretary-General could be authorized to reclassify Professional posts at the levels P-1 to P-5 subject to certain overall limits. This approach appears to be the most transparent and practical one.

26. In order to ensure that the relationship between the overall numbers for each grade level is maintained, the current overall proportions of posts at different levels would need to be preserved. This can be achieved only if upgradings of certain posts justified by expanded responsibilities assigned to them are offset by downgrading of other posts through a broader and more active review process. Such a procedure should also ensure that the existing appropriations for staff are respected, subject to the usual adjustments for fluctuations in currency and inflation rates.

27. In this context, it would also be necessary to decide whether the relationship between overall numbers for each grade level is to be maintained at the section level or at the level of the programme budget as a whole and whether the maintenance of the relationship would need to be on a strictly one-for-one basis between upgradings and downgradings or whether some minor overall shifts could take place within defined ranges. An example of such ranges, based on the current percentage distribution of grade levels, is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3. Grade distribution of established and temporary Professional posts approved in the context of the initial appropriations for 1994-1995 and illustrative application of ranges for the purposes of reclassification

	Approved staffing in 1994-1995	Percentage distribution (rounded)	Proposed percentage range	Range in posts at current level of approved staffing
P-5	685	20	19.5-20.49	676-710
P-4	1 153	33	32.5-33.49	1 127-1 161
P-3	1 095	32	31.5-32.49	1 092-1 126
P-2/1	535	15	14.5-15.49	502-537
Total	3 468	100		

28. In the view of the Secretary-General, the benefit of such a change of approach would be maximized if he were allowed the flexibility of maintaining the relationship between the overall numbers for each grade at the level of the programme budget as a whole and if the relationship was defined as a range consistent with the current percentage distribution between grade levels as shown in table 3 above. Under such a system, the overall numbers and relative proportions of Professional posts under the regular budget would only vary with the creation and suppression of posts.

29. In order for the Secretary-General to take advantage of the new flexibility afforded by these procedures, steps will be taken to strengthen the linkages between staffing table control, organizational structure and classification analysis so as to forge a more integrated management tool.

30. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/228 C concerning adequate control by the Secretariat and monitoring by the Assembly, the following procedures are proposed:

(a) When there is no net change in the distribution of posts in the programme budget as approved by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General would have the flexibility to reclassify posts up to the P-5 level;

(b) Should the Secretary-General change the distribution of posts through reclassification by plus or minus 0.5 per cent in each grade (see table 3) above, ensuring that the existing appropriation is not exceeded, the changes would be submitted to the General Assembly for approval;

(c) The procedures in subparagraphs (a) and (b) above would require a submission by the Secretary-General of revised estimates annually in order to reflect the changes in the current budget as well as in the resource base of the proposed programme budget for the following biennium.

31. Proposals for the reclassification of posts up to the P-5 level that would result in additional resources would only be submitted in the context of budget proposals for the following biennium. Proposals for reclassification of posts at the D-1 level and above would also be submitted in the context of budget proposals for the following biennium.

C. Conversion of posts

32. The Secretary-General's proposed programme budget can also include proposals to change the status of existing staffing provisions, generally through an increase in established posts. Such proposals can include conversion of temporary posts to established status, conversion of extrabudgetary posts to funding under the regular budget and conversion of temporary assistance provisions to posts.

33. In the first case, where functions initially conceived for a limited duration have clearly taken on a more permanent character, the conversion of temporary posts to established status may be appropriate. There are generally no financial implications from such a conversion. Conversions of extrabudgetary posts to funding under the regular budget can result from a change in the nature of an activity, or from a re-evaluation of the criteria for the sharing of costs between the regular budget and other sources of funding. Conversion of temporary assistance provisions to established posts would be appropriate when the temporary functions carried out by short-term staff under temporary assistance become permanent.

34. Each of these types of conversion is somewhat different, as is each case. Clearly, such proposals must be adequately explained and justified by the Secretary-General in the context of his overall proposed programme budget.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

35. The effective implementation of procedures and norms for the creation, suppression, reclassification, conversion and redeployment of posts depends on a number of factors, including a careful analysis of the work programme, the setting of priorities, the distribution of responsibilities and adequate workload standards, as well as timely and comprehensive reviews. The decision of the General Assembly to grant the Secretary-General the authority to reclassify posts up to the P-5 level, subject to certain conditions, would provide a measure of flexibility in the management of the staffing table, enabling the Secretary-General to respond in a more timely manner to his responsibilities for implementing the wide range of activities requested by the Member States.

36. The General Assembly may wish:

(a) To take note of the present report;

(b) To endorse the criteria for the creation, suppression and redeployment of posts (paras. 11-13);

(c) To endorse the procedures for the classification of posts up to the P-5 level (paras. 30 and 31).

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/46/16), para. 42.

2/ A/C.5/47/4.

3/ A/C.5/48/2.

4/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 7, document A/48/7/Add.11.

5/ A/C.5/48/75.

6/ The composition and functions of the Advisory Panel on Management and Finance are described in bulletin ST/SGB/270 of 14 January 1994.